

THE EMS Counts Act would require the Department of Labor to collect accurate occupational data on first responders, particularly firefighters and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel. This data is necessary to ensure that communities are able to quickly respond to emergencies and natural disasters.

BACKGROUND

Emergency medical services (EMS) is an integral component of our nation's response capacity to disasters and crises, including to outbreaks of diseases, bombings, mass shootings, and natural disasters. EMS consists of a diverse group of health care practitioners, including Paramedics, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), and dual-role Firefighter/EMTs and Firefighter/Paramedics. These professionals respond to nearly 28.5 million 9-1-1 calls each year. Without correct data on the number of EMTs and Paramedics practicing throughout the U.S., it is difficult to meet the health and safety needs of our communities.

The U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Statistics (BLS) collects data on and releases a monthly jobs report, which includes job creation and loss information. Unfortunately, the Department of Labor's current occupational classification system does not accurately classify firefighters whose primary job is being a paramedic or EMT. Not recognizing their cross-training leads to a significant and chronic undercount of EMS personnel in the U.S.

The BLS has not implemented recommendations from the Joint National EMS Leadership Forum (JNEMSLF), a coalition of 17 national EMS and emergency medicine organizations, to change its data collection system in order to accurately count the number of firefighters who also serve as EMS personnel. Heeding these recommendations would enable the U.S. to track gaps in emergency services and meet the emergency health care needs of communities, including planning for daily needs and major disasters.

As an example of the problem this creates, in 2016, the BLS determined that 248,000 full-time EMTs and Paramedics serve in the U.S. This estimate is likely an extreme undercount because cross-trained Firefighter/EMTs and Firefighter/Paramedics were not counted as part of the EMS workforce, and 62% of fire departments provide EMS, according to the U.S. Fire Administration. These data stand in stark contrast to the state agencies that license EMTs and paramedics, which estimate that there are nearly 909,000 EMS personnel as of May 2020.

SUMMARY OF THE BILL

The EMS Counts Act would require the Secretary of Labor to revise the Standard Occupational Classification System by dividing the general occupational category of Firefighter into four sub-categories. Specifically, the bill directs the BLS to revise the

broad description under the occupational series “33-2011 16 Firefighters” of the 2018 Standard Occupational Classification System of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to include the following new occupations:

- (1) Firefighters.
- (2) Firefighter/EMTs.
- (3) Firefighter/Paramedics.
- (4) Firefighters, All Other.

These changes will address the chronic miscounting of EMS personnel by allowing firefighters to identify themselves as cross-trained EMS providers.